



# City of West Lake Hills

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December 18, 2024

Dear CTRMA Board Members,

Since my letter on December 13, 2024, I attended a workshop with CTRMA technical staff at Rollingwood City Hall. The observations from my previous letter proved true. I listened to justifications and explanations by technical staff. Frankly the explanations fall short. Below, I will include my original observations, technical staff justifications, and my response.

1. Communities using either Bee Cave Rd. or Loop 360 will lose access to Northbound MoPac express lanes, the entrance near 15th street will be eliminated, leading to dangerous gridlock on the Cesar Chavez loop around at Austin High.
  1. **CTRMA Staff Justification (CSJ):**
    1. In order to prevent weaving to the express lanes from the main lanes, as well as allow speedier travel from the express lanes to Windsor and Enfield, the current entrance point ought to be eliminated.
    2. There's a low probability mapping software would reroute traffic around Austin High, because the traffic flow on regular lanes will quicken substantially.
  2. **Our Response:**
    1. Switching this entrance to an exit for the purpose of accessing Enfield will cause express lanes drivers to merge across three lanes of traffic quickly – the opposite of the intentions of staff. Relatively speaking, there is much more space to get across regular lanes to this current entrance from Bee Cave Rd. than there would be for drivers exiting from the expresslane to Enfield.
    2. Regular lane traffic will quickly return to its current state once construction finishes – this is always the case with highway expansion in growing cities. Mapping software will reroute drivers if the alternative saves even a few minutes, drivers will be rerouted around Austin High (unless the loop around is already gridlocked).
2. The current access to Bee Cave Rd. from Southbound MoPac express lanes will be eliminated and converted into an entrance.
  1. **CSJ:** Not specifically addressed, but generally addressed. Similar to the point above, Staff's goal is to avoid weaving and to keep the express lane moving quickly.
  2. **Our Response:** The current exit from Southbound Mopac express lanes to the current exit to Bee Cave Rd. is 1.1 miles. The current exit from Southbound Mopac express lanes to the proposed exit to Bee Cave Rd. is a little less than a mile. Note I've had to approximate these distances from physical maps at Rollingwood city hall as the online presentations have no such details. Presuming these numbers are true, this is not a dramatic change. What's more, the reconfiguration as an entrance makes no sense. This new entrance will be just north of Lake Austin Blvd. The next entrance will be just before Barton Springs Rd. (the combined exit to Bee Cave Rd.). There's simply no reason to cut off expressway users from Bee Cave Rd. The predictable net impact will be for express lane users to exit Cesar Chavez, loop around Austin High and use Red Bud Trail. Austin's planned redesign for that bridge did not contemplate such an influx. Of course,

as above, drivers won't be rerouted by mapping software should the Emmett Shelton Bridge already be gridlocked.

3. The exit to Cesar Chavez from the express lane and the entrance to regular Northbound MoPac from Bee Cave Rd. overlap, forcing drivers to crisscross in a dangerous bottleneck.
  1. **CSJ:** The conditions are relatively unchanged. Drivers exit the Northbound express lane exit at a safe distance from the Bee Cave Rd. entrance. Bee Cave Rd. maintains a separate lane for entry onto regular Mopac.
  2. **Our Response:** The entry onto Mopac from Bee Cave Rd. will no longer lead directly to the Cesar Chavez exit. It merges into the exit lane for Cesar Chavez. Currently, drivers who want to continue North from Bee Cave Rd. merge one lane over. Under this plan, drivers will be required to merge two lanes over. To make matters worse, the Cesar Chavez exit is sure to be the most popular exit from the expanded express lanes. Drivers attempting to go Northbound on regular lanes from Bee Cave will have to compete with the highest volume of express lane traffic – that which wants to get to Cesar Chavez – which was previously moving quickly, in order to get two lanes over to drive North. It is a certainty that drivers coming off the express lane will be moving faster than those in the regular lane although Staff disputes this. One simply has to take the current existing South exit from the existing toll lanes to see this effect in action.
4. Exiting to Bee Cave Rd. from regular Southbound MoPac lanes requires drivers to crisscross with drivers entering the express lane, creating a dangerous bottleneck.
  1. **CSJ:** The exit to Bee Cave Rd. from regular lanes has been improved as the new exit to Bee Cave Rd. will be further North along the frontage road giving drivers more time to cross the frontage road and get to Bee Cave.
  2. **Our Response:** We appreciate the exit being moved further North. However, our residents will be competing with all the accelerating traffic – who's goal is to get onto the express lanes – coming off the new ramp at Sixth Street in order to exit at Bee Cave. Again, perhaps this doesn't show up in the models but is quite evident from lived experience, when drivers feel they've been liberated from the quagmire of the regular lanes, they quickly accelerate.

Apart from our particular concerns, I have a few observations about the process. Frequently, and especially with regards to extremely long-term projects, the response to all concerns becomes a reference to a model. However, a model is only as useful as the data that guides it and the further out the projections, the more useless even the most accurate models become. I presume all or most of you on this Board have some experience with corporate America. Have you ever seen a company hit its thirty-year growth targets? Have you ever made a spreadsheet that, without any further revisions, you had any real faith in that proved accurate after year five? Maybe you blew your expectations out of the water, maybe you failed them, but I presume you never hit them within any small margin of error. In the mid to very long term, common sense wins out.

On the data in the model itself, staff made a few contradictory claims that give me pause. We first heard that Bee Cave Rd. was not included in the model. Then we heard that travel from East to West wasn't included in the model – which leads me to presume traffic from 360 was also excluded; however, that was not stated explicitly. Then we learned that maybe East West traffic was included in the model through a 2015 University of Texas study (should this be true, given that it's 2024, staff ought to be able to fact check the accuracy of said study after nine years). Then I learned that apparently,

according to Campo's 2045 master transit plan model, 360 and Bee Cave Rd. users were either 4% of the users of the Northbound expresslane or I learned that only 4% of 360 and Bee Cave Rd. users take the expresslane. The first, despite being a small number, would imply extremely high per capita use of the current expresslane. The second, not so much. But then, I believe we also learned that the census tracts used for that model included only Rollingwood, Treemont, and Lost Creek – excluding the vast majority of people coming from the West. Lastly and most importantly, the model does not include data from the inevitable expansion of 45 to I35.

Let's move away from the model and talk about our shared experience. I've lived here most of my life as I presume you all have as well. Staff told us at the open house that we ought not to worry about our loss of access to and from Northbound express lanes because it would only add three minutes to our trips from Bee Cave Rd. to 2222. According to staff, the new express lanes will vacuum up so much traffic as to liberate regular lanes leading to a perpetually harmonious flow of travelers. Common sense says such a claim is pure fantasy. One merely has to sit on MoPac in regular lanes in either direction from 3:30-6:30pm to realize life is pretty much back for regular lane users to exactly what it was prior to expresslane construction. As stated above, such is the case for new or expanded highways in growing cities across the nation. A side note – the Board ought to ask staff for a report on how the traffic flow on regular lanes of Northbound Expressway model has held up to the test of time.

So, what does common sense tell us about the future of MoPac? 45 will be expanded, Mopac will turn into a second I35, truck traffic and all, and the only reprieve will be the Express Lanes. Consequently, the plans cannot be limited to catering to the needs of just the commuters to the North and South. Care must be taken at this moment to include the common sense requests from Bee Cave Rd. and Loop 360 users to maintain access and limit direct vehicular jousting upon entering or exiting the roadway.

Thank you as always for your dedication, time, and attention,

Best regards,



James Vaughan  
Mayor  
City of West Lake Hills